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AN

ANNIVERSARY SERMON,

PREACHED IN

7551.416

St. James' Church, Roxbury,

ON

WHITSUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1862,

BY THE RECTOR. Geo. S. Converse.

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BOSTON:
J. E. FARWELL & COMPANY, PRINTERS TO THE CITY,
No. 37 Congress Street.
1862.

From 5452.64
171.296
Jan. 13, 1875

with regards of
J. W. Hunt

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SERMON.

"He thanked God and took courage." — Acts xxviii. 15.

This is the Evangelist's record of the feelings of St. Paul, when, towards the close of his eventful journey to Rome, the brethren from that city came to meet him "as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns." I have chosen it for a text, intending to use it apart from its connection, because I think that no language can more fitly express our thoughts as minister and people, as we enter God's house this morning. I cannot suppose, of course, that those who have lately joined us, can make these words their own as those can who have been longer in the parish, and yet I trust that they will gladly give us their sympathy, and unite with us in our song of praise and thanksgiving, so that of all of us, in our review of the past and our contemplation of the future, it may be said in truth, they "thanked God and took courage."

The return of this holy festival of Whitsunday, reminds me that I have reached the close of the third year of my Rectorship. I cannot allow the anniversary to pass without some recognition, both for my own sake and yours, of God's merciful goodness to us; and I know not that I can better observe the day than by living over with you the certain past, and looking forward with you to the uncertain future.

You will remember that a year ago I gave you a comprehensive statement of the condition of the parish during the two years preceding. I propose now to inform you of its condition and progress during the year just closed, and to include in my remarks a review of the whole period of my ministry thus far; and I shall then make such suggestions as seem to me necessary for our growth, under God, in the future.

I have reported this year 58 communicants added; 23 died or removed; the whole number 207, — being an increase in three years of 120.

In the parish Sunday-school on Whitsunday, 1859, the number of scholars was 87, and the number of teachers 13. In 1860, my first report to the Bishop, I reported 21 teachers and 169 scholars, being an increase of 8 teachers and 82 scholars. In 1861 I reported 25 teachers and 250 scholars, — being an increase over the preceding year of 4 teachers and 81 scholars, and an increase for the two years of 12 teachers and 163 scholars. This year I have reported 29 teachers and 269 scholars, — being an increase over last year of 4 teachers and 19 scholars, and an increase for the three years of 16 teachers and 182 scholars.

The Young Ladies' Bible Class, which meets on Friday afternoons, numbers 12. I have also reported in our Mission School, of which I shall speak hereafter, — teachers 15. Scholars: Male Bible Class, 17; Female Bible Class, 21; children, 61; — total 99, — making the whole number of persons receiving religious instruction in the parish, 380.

The Baptisms, in 1860, were (infants 28, adults 4)

32; in 1861, (infants 48, adults, 6) 54; in 1862, (infants 55, adults 3) 58. Total in three years (infants 131, adults 13) 144.

The number confirmed, in 1860, was 32; in 1861, 17; in 1862, 26. Total in three years, 75.

The marriages, in 1860, were 3; in 1861, 4; in 1862, 5. Total in three years, 12.

The burials, in 1860, were 9; in 1861, 27; in 1862, 21. Total in three years, 57.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS HAVE BEEN AS FOLLOWS:

For general Domestic Missions	in 1860	$160 00			
" " " "	in 1861	53 28			
" " " "	in 1862	101 74	3 years,	$315	02
" Diocesan Missions	in 1860	175 00			
" " "	in 1861	110 29			
" " "	in 1862	149 30	3 years,	434	59
" the Jews	in 1860	15 00		15	00
" the American Bible Society	in 1861	84 32			
" " " "	in 1862	62 50	2 years,	146	82
" Foreign Missions	in 1861	112 16			
" " "	in 1862	108 65	2 years,	220	81
The Sunday School Contributions	in 1860	100 00			
" " " "	in 1861	100 00			
" " " "	in 1862	140 00	3 years,	340	00
" Communion Offertory	in 1860	265 43			
" " "	in 1861	402 62			
" " "	in 1862	360 44	3 years,	1,028	49
For the Christmas Festival	in 1859	102 00			
" " "	in 1860	92 00			
" " "	in 1861	65 98	3 years,	259	98
For Gas, Carpets, Tablets, and other improvements in Church	in 1860	566 91		566	91
" the Benevolent Society	in 1861	140 00			
" " "	in 1862	147 13	2 years,	287	13
" the Sunday School	in 1860	65 50			
" " "	in 1861	56 51			
" " "	in 1862	65 98	3 years,	187	99
" liquidation of Floating Debt	in 1861	3,900 00		3,900	00
" Soldiers	in 1862	50 67		50	67
" Prayer Books and Tracts	in 1862	28 05		28	05
" Gloucester sufferers	in 1862	50 00		50	00

In a comprehensive summary, the contributions for benevolent objects outside the parish were, in

1860	$450 00	
1861	460 05	
1862	662 86	—3 years, $1,572 91

WITHIN THE PARISH:

1860	$ 999 84	
1861	4,591 13	
1862	668 44—3 years	$ 6,259 41

TOTAL WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE PARISH:

1860	$ 1,449 84
1861	5,051 18
1862	1,331 30
Total for three years	$ 7,832 32

I come now to speak of the work of the BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, and though the report of the Secretary will shortly be printed and distributed throughout the parish, I shall make such extracts from it as may be necessary, in order to give you a fair view of the condition of the parish in every department.

The BENEVOLENT SOCIETY was formed, as many of you are aware, a year ago last October, for the purpose primarily of searching out those persons in this city who by birth and baptism are members of the Church of England, but not connected with any parish; — with the design of awakening their interest in religion, and bringing them and their children under the ministrations of the Gospel in this parish, to which we consider them as belonging. The society is neither more nor less than an organization of Lay-Visitors, who, making their first object the spiritual work of the Christian churchman, are also charged as they may find it necessary, with the distribution of material aid. More minute particulars of the plan and the working of the society you will learn from the Report.

The whole number of families on record since October, 1860, when the work commenced, is 171. The number visited this year since October, 1861, is 125.

The number now visited is 114. The number of visitors is 25. Bibles, Prayer Books, and Tracts have been distributed as required. Forty-one families have received more or less material aid. The visitors, in almost every instance, have been kindly welcomed, and the work seems to have been greatly blessed.

Nothing in all my residence here, has given me more real pleasure,—and I am sure it must be equally gratifying to you,—than the knowledge that our brethren and sisters of the Church of England, providentially located here, but hitherto for the most part neglected by the parish, whose duty it is to watch over them and gather them within its fold, are now, in so many cases, becoming interested in the church, and are being led to realize that the wide ocean has not separated them from the care of that church in which they were baptized, and where,—though in after years they may have sadly neglected her solemn services,—they were first taught to lisp, "Our Father who art in heaven."

We had hardly entered upon our work before we began to feel the importance of making provision for an afternoon Sunday School, somewhere in the neighborhood of Tremont Street. We found that children who attended our school in the morning were in the habit of going to other schools in the afternoon, and that several who properly belonged to us were unable, from the distance, or other causes, to come to the morning school;—while we were aware, also, that a wide field of Christian usefulness was opened to us in that region among many who could not be considered as belonging to any religious body in particular.

On the 17th of November last, — the twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity, — a Mission Sunday School was opened in a small hall in Ruggles Street, near Tremont Street, — the only hall, small or large, which we could find suitable to our purpose, in that section of the city. We began with 1 Superintendent, 12 Teachers, and 42 Scholars. The school now numbers 1 Superintendent, 15 Teachers, and 207 Scholars, — divided as follows: Male Bible Class, 17; Female, 21; children, 169. Of the children 108 attend also the morning Sunday School in the church.

The success of the enterprise thus far has exceeded my most sanguine expectations. The numbers have steadily increased from the commencement, and the average attendance is always large. The children seem to enjoy their school, and the adult Bible-classes, which we cannot but regard as one of the most important branches of our work, manifest very great interest in the instruction which they receive. It is but right that I should say that this success, under God, is owing entirely to the fidelity and zeal of the Superintendent and Teachers, as I have been but an occasional visitor since the day the school was opened.

The Sewing School has gone through a second year of pleasant and profitable work. It has met weekly from October 12, 1861, to April 19, 1862, — twenty-seven weeks. The largest number present at any one time was 83, and the smallest 28, being an average of 61; a larger average attendance than last year by 5. The school has, in every respect, been most admirably managed, and the Superintendent and Teachers have the satisfaction of seeing their exertions rewarded by

the evident improvement of the children, whose whole deportment and progress demand from me the expression of my hearty commendation.

The Ladies' Sewing Circle made, in 1860, 132 garments; in 1861, 136; in 1862, 200. Total in three years, 468.

Late in the winter of 1861, there was formed an Employment Department of the Benevolent Society, for the purpose of supplying women with sewing, and thus enabling them, to a certain extent, to help themselves, instead of depending upon others. Though in operation but a part of that winter, it assisted 13 women to the amount of $46.19. In October last an Employment Society was organized for this purpose, distinct from the Benevolent Society. They have furnished employment to thirty-one women, to the amount of $150.75. The number of garments made was 850.

The Helping Hand, — a society composed of some of the young ladies of the parish, — have supplied the families of three of our western missionaries with garments to the number of 209, amounting in value to $240.

The parish has also done its fair proportion towards providing for the soldiers.

In our mission-work we have labored hitherto under great disadvantage from the want of a proper and convenient room in a central location. I am greatly gratified, however, that I am able to say that arrangements have been made for the building of a hall, which shall be leased to us, which we hope to occupy early in September. We shall make that the centre of our work, and I trust that an influence may go out thence which

shall be greatly blessed of God to the souls and bodies of his children.

I would, my brethren, that I could show you all, — as I see it now, and as those who are working with me see it, — the nature and extent of the work which it is incumbent upon this parish to do just in proportion as God may give it the ability. We might find enough to employ our time and energies, were we simply to occupy ourselves with general mission-work in this city. But before we engage in that, we have another and paramount duty.

We are the only Protestant Episcopal Church in Roxbury. To us, then, are confided by God, — whether we recognize the trust or not, — all those persons resident here who by birth and baptism are members of the Church of England. Many such have come hither, and, employed in factories or trades or otherwise, they are living near each other, all along Tremont Street, and the streets adjacent; forming, so to speak, almost a settlement of English people, — while in the extreme eastern section of the city there is also a large number of them. There is a work for Christ to be done among them, and it rests with us to do it. The Church of their forefathers must not neglect them. The Gospel in the Church must be carried to their very doors, and the work of this parish will not be fulfilled, until somewhere along or near Tremont Street a chapel shall be built, and an assistant minister of this parish appointed, who shall have it in sole charge. Satan has planted *his* church, — if we may so speak, — in almost every block, and temptation, in one form or another, meets men, women, and children at every cor-

ner. With no provision made by any one for their improvement or their recreation, multitudes find their evening's enjoyment only in the beer-shop. To many the Lord's day is as any other day, and feeling as if no one cared for them, and as if religion and the church were not for *them ;* with no daily evidence of the existence of a church, — whose presence would be a silent monitor to duty, — they live on from day to day and from week to week, " without God and without hope in the world." To some there comes the memory of other days when they sat by their father's side in the old parish church, and conscience prompts them to make new resolutions of amendment; but, with no helping hand and daily warning voice to aid them, old habits and present temptation prove too strong for them, and they relapse into indifference. With others there is no such memory; they have yet to be taught the first principles of religion, and to learn the mission of our Saviour Christ.

Since I saw what was incumbent for us to do, I have endeavored to do something towards making a beginning in the work, — and our lay visitors, and our Sunday Schools and adult classes, are gradually and steadily carrying it on. In the year to come, when we shall have occupied our new hall, I intend, by God's help, to establish there, at any rate, a Sunday evening service, and I hope that in other respects I may be able to do something towards the development of the plan which I have in my mind. But three things are necessary to the fulfilment of the whole duty of St. James' Church towards our English brethren in Roxbury; viz: a chapel in their neighborhood which shall be *their*

church, — whose doors they shall pass in their daily walks, — whose very presence shall speak to them of God; some kind of provision for their instruction and recreation during the week, — that is to say, some place of resort which shall offer them greater attractions than the beer-shop; and a clergyman, whose whole time and attention shall be devoted to proper ministerial work among them, — who shall be their friend and counsellor, and be able to follow up the work of the laity more faithfully than it is possible for me to do. And then, when we shall have done thus much, there are very many others, not Church of England people, who will demand our care. Of the sick and dying that I visit, — of the burials and baptisms at which I officiate, nearly all are among those who are not pewholders in this church, and would naturally attend the chapel. I am perfectly conscious that, however good my intentions, I am daily leaving undone what I ought to do, as the rector of this parish, among the English people. God giving me health and strength, I mean to do what I can; but I shall never cease to feel the burden of work undone or half done, till I can see another clergyman taking the exclusive charge of this mission.

I have dwelt thus long upon this subject, brethren, not because I expect this parish to do more than they are able to do, nor because I think that the plan to which I have referred can be carried out immediately, but because I regard it as a subject of paramount importance. You will tell me that I am looking to the *future*, and so I am. Still, I can assure you that the future is not so far distant as I dare say many of you

imagine. No, beloved. Whatever else is left undone, *this work must be done.* The West calls for our contributions to carry the Gospel there; "the heathen in their blindness" mutely plead for us to tell them that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by; this and that object of Christian benevolence ask, and have a right to ask, our sympathy and support; — but first of all, and above all, our brethren at our doors, — children with us by baptism of our beloved church, sent to us by God in his providence, — *they* claim our attention and our care. I commend the subject to your prayerful consideration. Only let us all be awake to a conviction of the work that we have to do, and God, in his own good time, will enable us to do it.

The Church, I need hardly tell you, is fuller now than it has ever been before. The morning congregations are large, while the attendance in the afternoon is materially increased since the change in the hour of service. I would that I could say more than this. I would that I could feel that all, old and young, who worship here in the morning, desire to come in the afternoon, and make it a point to do so, unless providentially prevented.

I am well aware, of course, as I have said before, that there are many who, for one very good reason or another, find it impossible to attend Divine service more than once a day. But, beloved, where there is no such reason, — where the question simply is whether one shall be found in one's place in the House of God, or shall spend the afternoon in slumber or recreation, — it requires no second thought to understand one's duty. A half day's attendance is becoming far

too common in all parts of our land, but in no part more than this. So far as my influence extends, I desire to protest against it. I believe that any practice which tends to give the *religious* observance of the Lord's day a subordinate place, is to be jealously avoided, — that the dedication of one half of the day to God, and the other half to self, is a fatal perversion of the institution of the Sabbath. The day is consecrated to God, and, while we are not to keep the feast as a Jewish, but as a Christian Sabbath, — while we are to observe it in the spirit of the text, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," — we are to remember that it *is* a SABBATH, that God has blessed the day and hallowed it; and we are to remember, moreover, that it is the day which has been specially set apart by God for the refreshment and the instruction of the soul.

But if I am obliged to say thus much with regard to our afternoon attendance, — when the congregation is small only in comparison with the morning, — what shall I say with regard to our *Evening* congregation on the third Sunday in the month? I have felt it my duty to employ the afternoon of that day in the instruction of the children of the parish in the Catechism, as the Church directs; and I have felt that were I to have the regular service and congregation, and substitute the Catechism for the Sermon, I should not be able to do justice to the children without wearying them, — if, indeed, I could find room for them in addition to the ordinary congregation. I have, therefore, put the service in the evening. I thought at first that it was an arrangement which my people would enjoy, but I find

myself mistaken. No one knows how trying these Sunday evenings are to me, — how, as I look around upon the rows of empty pews, I find my only comfort and my only strength in the remembrance of the promise, — "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But we know that a blessing may descend upon the many from the prayers of the few. "The spirit of God" may yet "move upon the face of the waters," and, breathing upon this congregation, may prompt many to improve the opportunities which they now neglect, and to utter the song: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." May God, in his own good time, grant us this blessing.

The attendance at our Lenten services, as during the two years preceding, was quite good. The Wednesday and Friday services, during the remainder of the year, are not so well attended as I could desire. A few familiar faces always meet me. But I do not see, as I long to see, others of my people dropping in from time to time, to join with us in an invocation for God's blessing. The privilege of prayer in God's holy temple is not to be lightly esteemed. Oh! that we may all value it, and improve it as we ought.

Since Easter, I have placed our Wednesday service at 8 o'clock in the morning, as an experiment. I thought that during the month of June it might possibly be a more agreeable hour to the people, and that some of the business men of the congregation might be glad to avail themselves of the opportunity for a half hour of prayer on their way to town. I regret to

say that my expectations have not been realized, and that the hour has not proved to be convenient.

In reviewing the past, and looking forward to the future, there are two or three other points upon which I wish to speak.

This parish suffers, and probably always will suffer, more or less, in common with suburban parishes in general, from the fluctuating character of the population. Had we all those now with us who have left us since Whitsunday, 1859, we should be literally crowded, aisles and all. We have lost many whom we could ill afford to lose, and it has seemed, sometimes, as if a family no sooner became interested in the church, and ready to engage in its work, than God called them in His providence elsewhere. However, He knows what is best for us. But this fact, always existing and always to exist, that St. James' is a fluctuating parish, renders it all the more necessary that we should seek in every possible way to consolidate its members in community of interest and attachment to the church; so that every one whose name is enrolled here shall feel that this is his spiritual home, — that the interests of the church are *his* interests, — that he has a part in the upbuilding here of a spiritual temple unto the Lord, — that he fills a niche which no one else can fill so well.

I rejoice to bear testimony, as I did on last Thanksgiving day, to the excellent feeling in the parish, — in the vestry and the congregation, — to the entire absence of cliques and parties, and to our freedom, so far as my knowledge extends, from any of those disturbing ele-

ments which in so many cases militate against a parish's health and growth. I believe the spirit of our parishioners is *willing*, and only needs to be brought out, and I, therefore, speak with pleasure and with confidence of two things which I regard as necessary, in order to the successful consolidation of the parish.

The one is a more general acquaintance among the members of the parish, — a more general feeling and expression of interest in one another, as members of the same household of faith; and the other is a more general division of the church-work of the parish, which is now so faithfully done by comparatively a very few.

With regard to this second point my plans are already formed, and I shall endeavor, if spared to the fall, to interest more of you, brethren, in the work which interests me so much, and to give you all an opportunity of doing something in it if you will.

With regard to the first point, I think that a responsibility rests upon the *older members* of the parish, which they can hardly be said to have met. The subject is one which holds no small place in the consideration of the elements of parochial growth, and I trust that in the year to come, more attention may be given to it than has been given to it hitherto. I am well aware that a Rector may often do very much himself towards making his people better acquainted with each other, but situated as I am, and as I expect to be the coming year, it is not in my power to do for the parish what I should otherwise be very glad to do.

And here I desire to say a word, which I may never have a better opportunity to say, about my own parish

visiting. I am very often told by my parishioners that they are surprised at not seeing me more frequently, — and sometimes a friend informs me that some one in the parish is feeling aggrieved that I do not call.

I will frankly say that these remarks grieve me. If the complaint is just, either I am neglecting my duty, or my people have very erroneous ideas as to what my duty is. But, brethren, the complaint is not just. My intention is to visit all my parishioners twice a year, — once in the Spring and once in the Fall, — but I have never yet accomplished it. And few of you can be expected to know and appreciate the hindrances which have been in my way, or the amount of work of one kind and another which I have had to do in my three years ministry among you. Few of you realize that my work, — necessary to be done, — is not bounded by these eighty pews, but reaches to the poor, the sick, the dying, and the dead, who claim my ministrations, though they be not pewholders in the church.

With regard to *special* visits, I beg to repeat what I said in my Anniversary Sermon a year ago.

" My earnest desire is to be to you all that a Rector ought to be. So long as my Master keeps me here, my best services shall be at your disposal. In health or in sickness, — in prosperity or adversity, — whenever, dear brethren, you desire to consult me, you may always rely upon my ready sympathy and my best counsel. And here let me remind you that a Rector has no certain means of knowing when any of his parishioners are ill and wish to see him, *unless they send for him.* People sometimes are ill for weeks, and desire to see their minister. They wonder that he

does not come to see them, and they feel sorely grieved at what they consider his neglect. *But they never think of sending for him.* They seem to take it for granted that in some way or other he will learn of their illness, and know that a visit will be acceptable. It is a clergyman's right to be definitely notified by his parishioners, whenever they wish his special services; and they should never take it for granted that he will know their wishes without a direct communication from themselves; while it is equally the parishioners' right to feel that they have a claim upon a certain portion of their Rector's time, and that by virtue of his office, their Rector should be their friend and sympathizer."

But I must close. The suggestions which have occupied so large a portion of this sermon have been made simply because of my earnest desire for the prosperity and the best good of the parish. Far removed as they may have seemed from my text, they are yet closely connected with the thoughts which that text suggests, and but follow in my mind my feeling of gratitude to God for the blessings which he has bestowed upon St. James' in the last three years.

In my survey of our condition, I see only abundant reason why we should "thank God" for the past, and "take courage" for the future. And yet I have said nothing as to the one only proof of real parochial life — the growth in grace of Christ's disciples, — the adding "to the Church daily of such as shall be saved." Our assemblings together for public worship, — our union in work for our fellow-men, — this sacred relation which we hold as pastor and people, — all look to one end, — the advancement of the kingdom of Christ,

our own salvation, and the spread of the Gospel in the world.

How far this great end is being reached, is a solemn question, which can best be answered by each one's heart. We have indeed reason to feel that the Holy Ghost is with us. We have encouragement to pray that He will yet visit us more abundantly with his love and favor. Oh! that we may all be united to Christ in a true and living faith; that "our loins my be girded about and our lights burning; and we ourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately;"—that, "building up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, we may keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."